

Mary's role in the repudiation of their beliefs of Pagans, Jews and Moors

O papel da Virgem Maria no repúdio das crenças de pagãos, judeus e mouros

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Resumo

As *Cantigas de Santa Maria* de Afonso X, rei de Castela e Leão (1252-1284) contêm 420 milagres e louvores à Virgem Maria. Identificámos 41 milagres cujos protagonistas são judeus, 51 sobre mouros e 5 sobre pagãos. Destes, seleccionámos dez – três com judeus, seis com mouros e um com um pagão – uma vez que só estes apresentam conversões ao Cristianismo. Comparativamente, verifica-se que a ação destas cantigas narrativas coincide com o que Afonso X afirmou nas suas *Siete Partidas*, sobre o modo como os não cristãos devem ser tratados. Tivemos em consideração, não só as leis sobre o modo como os não cristãos devem ser tratados nos seus reinos, mas também aquelas leis mais específicas que se reportam à conversão ao cristianismo vigente. Os restantes elementos das suas religiões não podem impedir as conversões, sob pena de morte pelo fogo. As duas obras afonsinas, apesar dos seus diferentes formatos, apoiam-se mutuamente.

Palavras-chave: *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, Judeus, Mouros, Pagãos, Conversões ao cristianismo.

Abstract

The *Cantigas de Santa Maria* of Alfonso X, king of Castile and León (1252-1284) contains 420 miracles and praise songs for the Virgin Mary. We have identified 41 with Jewish protagonists, 51 with Moors and 5 with pagans. Ten of these – three with Jews, 6 with Moors and one with a pagan – have been selected for treatment as they involve conversions to Christianity. Side by side, the actions of these miracle narrations are supported by what Alfonso declared to be their treatment in his law code, the *Siete Partidas*. There, laws regarding how non-Christians are to be treated along with specific laws about their conversion to the Christian law of the land are taken into account. Members of their religions may not impede conversions under penalty of death by fire. Both the *Cantigas* and the *Siete Partidas* reflect one another faithfully.

Keywords: *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, Jews, Moors, Pagans. Conversion to Christianity.



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In all religious communities through the centuries, the degree of belonging and the level of any member's belief has been a matter for study. However, there exist cases of interfaith conversions, of men and women rejecting their former beliefs and accepting new ones. Such cases may involve strong reactions on the part of the remaining members of the original community of believers against those who have chosen and converted to another religion, having come to believe that the new religion is the true way to aspire to a life after death.

I am here proposing to look at a selected sample of such conversions occurring among the 420 narrative miracles and lyric hymns to Mary, the Mother, Daughter, Wife, and Handmaiden of the Christian God in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (CSM)¹, assembled and expanded in successive redactions by Alfonso X during his thirty-two-year reign (1252-1284). In such a Marian repertory, with several cases involving Jews, Moors and pagans who become converts to Christianity, it seems unnecessary to report that there are

¹ She is celebrated in the refrain of loor 180 thus: “Vella e Minya, / Madr’ e Donzela, / Pobre e Reynna, / Don’ e Ancela”, vv 2-5. And in the translation of K. Kulp-Hill: “Old Woman and Girl-Child, Mother and Maiden, Pauper and Queen, Mistress and Handmaiden”, p. 216. In this essay, the English translations are those of Prof. Kulp-Hill. (KULP-HILL, Kathleen (trans.) – *Songs of Holy Mary of Alfonso X. A Translation of the Cantigas de Santa Maria*. Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000).

no cases of Christian protagonists abandoning their faith². To the contrary, the didactic message running through the CSM involves expanding devotion to the Virgin Mary who was the heavenly benefactress of Alfonso X, patron of the repertory.

With this in view, it will not seem surprising that narratives involving Christian converts augmenting the devotion to Mary are the focal point of a certain number of the CSM's miracle narrations. Here, we will be focusing on a sampling of ten cases of conversions chosen from many narrated in the CSM. To judge them competently in the context of their inclusion in the Marian narrative songs, we will be making comparative notes with the treatment accorded these three groups in Alfonso's *Siete Partidas*. We hope to show that Alfonso X was very consistent in his reasoning about the judicial and legal treatment of all the peoples he governed, no matter what their religion.

Of course, the Virgin in the CSM intercedes for numerous Christians in need of mediation with Heaven, curing diverse illnesses and resuscitating dead infants, among a countless variety of other wonders. The Virgin also engages with pagans, Jews and Moors who form a not insignificant part of the Iberian population in Alfonso's thirteenth-century Spain. As succinctly put by H. Salvador Martínez:

El activismo social y la honestidad intelectual del Rey Sabio en materia de relaciones humanas se fundaban en su profundo conocimiento de la realidad cotidiana que los moradores de sus reinos compartían, La sociedad gobernada por Alfonso X estaba compuesta por la mayor diversidad étnica jamás vista en Europa hasta la fecha. (p. 17)

It comes then as no surprise that Jews are featured in 41, Moors in 51 and pagans in 5 of the CSM, the total comprising approximately 26% of its 358 miracle narrations (the remaining 42 CSM are lyric songs of praise).

² Partida VII, Title 24, chapter 7 might explain why this act of conversion is not covered in the CSM: "So wayward is the Christian who becomes a Jew, that we order him to be put to death, just as though he had become a heretic", p. 34. I am using the English translation of *Partida VII, title 24, chapter 7* in Dwayne E. Carpenter's *Alfonso X and the Jews. An Edition of and Commentary on Siete Partidas 7:24 "de los judíos"*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1986.

However, not all of these narrations involving non-Christians deal with conversions to Christianity. Many contain what H. Salvador Martínez calls “resabios antimusulmanes y antijudíos” (p. 22), involving occasions when they do not abide by the laws that Alfonso X establishes for them in the *Siete Partidas*. My sample of ten narratives does involve members of the three communities in which individuals repudiate their former beliefs (or non-belief in the case of pagans) and come to find in Christianity a new religious affiliation, owing to their benefitting from the miraculous help received from the Virgin Mary. These conversions, as we will see, often create a negative reaction on the part of their former co-religionists. I will first be dealing with three cantigas involving Jews³, then follow with six involving Moors⁴ and conclude with one cantiga involving a pagan.

To begin, let me cite from Alfonso's *Siete Partidas* (his law codes) his views on conversions of Jews:

Neither force nor compulsion in any form may be used to induce a Jew to become a Christian; rather Christians must convert Jews to the faith of Our Lord Jesus Christ by means of good deeds. [...] *If any Jew or Jewess willingly desires to become a Christian, his fellow Jews shall not hinder him in any way* (emphasis added)⁵.

Jews who hinder a fellow Jew who converts to Christianity – it is clearly stated – will be burned alive. H. Salvador Martínez adds that:

Alfonso escogió estas historias deliberadamente por su valor ejemplar para sus súbditos; ya que la esperanza de la conversión [...] era la razón principal por la que teólogos, concilios y autoridades eclesiásticas toleraban la presencia de los judíos en la comunidad cristiana. (Salvador Martínez, p. 260)

Thus, Alfonso's legislation required Jewish converts to be treated as other Christians.

³ There are seven cases of conversions of Jews: CSM 4, 25, 85, 89, 107, 108 and 133. We take up numbers 4, 89 and 107.

⁴ Eleven of the CSM deal with Muslim conversions: 26, 46, 165, 167, 181, 192, 205, 329, 344, 358 and 379. We will be commenting on CSM 46, 167, 181, 192, 205 and 329.

⁵ This is the English translation of part of Partida VII, title 24, chapter 6, p. 33, in Carpenter's *Alfonso X and the Jews*... Furthermore, Jewish converts shall be honored and not disparaged for their former beliefs, they also retain their properties and must always be treated as other Christians are treated.

We begin our three conversion narratives involving Jews with CSM 4. Its center is a Jewish family: the father, Samuel, is a glass maker and keeps a furnace burning for his work. His wife, Rachel, loves their only son very much. The son attends a Christian school which grieves his father. The son, a studious lad, had become a good friend of a group of Christians. One Eastertide when the abbot was giving to the students a communion wafer, the Jewish lad sensed that it was really the beautiful statue of the Virgin and Son that was administering the sacrament. Impressed, he joined the queue and the statue of the Virgin stretched out her hand and gave the Jewish lad a wafer which to him tasted like honey.

Later, when the son related this wonder at home, his father became so upset and violent that he threw his son into the flames of his furnace. His mother Rachel, shocked, runs into the street and returns with a crowd that felt compassion for her and her now dead son. But when they together opened the furnace door, Rachel's son was alive, proclaiming that he had been protected by the Virgin. Both the mother and son, with this miracle as proof, come to believe in the Christian faith and are baptized at once.

The Jewish father who was so enraged at his son's partaking of the communion wafer is then burned alive by the crowd and dies, unprotected by his god. Those who threw him into the flaming furnace must have been Jews, though the text does not specify this. However, if the witnesses to this miracle lived – as Alfonso's *Partidas* commanded them to do – in special barrios called *juderías*, it seems likely that it was Jews who pitched their Jewish neighbor into his furnace, an act of poetic justice: the father's intent to burn his son alive is then reversed and he becomes the victim of the furnace's flames and dies instead.

Next, CSM 89 presents us with a sinful Jewess who is having great difficulty giving birth. She is suffering such severe pain that she feels more dead than alive. Being a Jewess, she had not been a believer in the Virgin. It is the Virgin Mary, independently, feeling great pity for her suffering, sends a bright light before the Jewess' eyes out of which a mysterious voice advises her to appeal to the Mother of the Christian God. The suffering Jewess then prays to Mary, begging her for the safe delivery of her child.

Mary answers her prayer and the baby is born and the Jewess's own health is miraculously restored. However, the Jewesses who were attending her had listened to her praying to Mary and vociferously denounced her and fled from the house, calling her a "heretic," an "apostate" and, most damning of all, a "Christian convert." The grateful Jewess turned against her former coreligionists and, when she was able, went to the Christian church and had herself and her two children baptized after which she became a lifelong devotee of the Virgin.

Our final example involving Jews is CSM 107, which narrates an event that occurred in 1237. The Jewess in the text is not named but has come to be known as Marisaltos. Previously, this Jewess had allegedly committed some unspecified criminal offense and was convicted for it by a Jewish court and condemned to be thrown to a certain death from a high precipice in Segovia. She is led by a cortege of Jews to the edge of the precipice and desperate, seconds before she is to be pushed to her death, she remembers the Christian belief in Mary and she prays to her thus:

But, you, Queen Mary, in whom Christians believe, if it is true, as I have heard, that you succor the unfortunate women who are commended to you, among all the other guilty women, come to my aid, for I have great need. If I remain alive and well, I will, without fail, become a Christian at once, before another day dawns. (Kulp-Hill, p. 134)

And after the Virgin miraculously allows her a soft landing beyond the sharp rocks at the bottom of the cliff, the Jewess declares: "May [Mary] ever be praised. Who will not serve Her?" (Kulp-Hill, p. 134). Marisaltos then approaches a church and recounts the fresh miracle and is baptized with no delay and, subsequently, becomes a devout believer in She who will pray to her Son for us on Judgment Day.

In sum, these three CSM feature the Virgin's protection of one Jewish lad and of two erring Jewesses who sincerely pray to her following the example of Christians they know. The father of the lad, Samuel, is fittingly burned alive by the very flames in which he tried to murder his own son. The Jewish women who attend the pregnant Jewess cry out with open disdain of her prayer to Mary, and the Jewish law that decreed the harsh killing

of Marisaltos is made null and void owing to the Virgin's intercession. Jewish repudiation of Jews who convert is part of the three narrative poems. As it is stated in the *Siete Partidas*, they would be burned alive if they tried to induce their coreligionists to recant. They do not do this. In these three CSM, six Jews receive Christian baptism and their knowing that Christians seek Mary's mediation with their God is an important factor in these conversions.

We move now to the Moors. Alfonso X, in *Partida VII*, Title 25 has ten chapters "Concerning the Moors". Their religion – Islam – is termed "an insult to God". The Moor must, as must the Jews,

live among Christians [...] by observing their own law and not insulting ours.
[...] *Christians should endeavor to convert the Moors by causing them to believe in our religion, and bring them into it by kind words and suitable discourses, and not by violence or compulsion* (emphasis added)⁶.

Much of Title 25 is similar to that which was set down in laws concerning Jews in Title 24. But whereas Jews were termed obstinate toward Christianity, Islam is denounced as a foolish religion whose prophet Mohammed performed works of no extraordinary sanctity⁷. In addition, Christians who become Moors are termed insane and are put to death (while none of the CSM feature a conversion of a Christian to Islam, it was not unknown in Alfonso's time). But the Moors who lived under Alfonso's rule were routinely punished when they did not observe the laws of the Christian land.

In CSM 46, one man of the Moorish army that fought and pillaged in the Holy Land took home with him all he could manage to pilfer for himself. Among the pilfered items was a statue of the Virgin whose aesthetic qualities greatly appealed to him. Despite his gazing on it often, this Moor could not bring himself to imagine that the Christian God could

⁶ We cite from the English translation of Samuel Parsons Scott, in ALFONSO X – *Las Siete Partidas*. Vol.5. *Underworlds: the Dead, the Criminal and the Marginalized*. Trans. Samuel Parsons Scott and edited by Robert I. Burns; S. J. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, 1438.

⁷ Though we will here be emphasizing the conversion of Muslims in Spain to Christianity "No debemos olvidar [...] cuál fue el objetivo final de la actividad política alfonsí: la expulsión de los mahometanos del territorio cristiano y la reconquista de todo los antiguos territorios [...]." The citation is from MARTÍNEZ, H. Salvador – *La convivencia en España del siglo XIII. Perspectivas alfonsíes*. Madrid: Polifemo, 2006, p.333.

debase himself by becoming incarnate in a flesh and blood woman and walk among commoners with a view to saving the world. Still, he must have harbored a lingering doubt for he said to himself: “However, if He would make one of His manifestations to me, He would cause me to become a Christian at once and be confirmed along with these bearded Moors” (Kulp-Hill, p. 62). What does God do to manifest himself to this Moor?

He caused the breasts of the confiscated statue of the Virgin, so greatly admired by this Moor, to become flesh and from them poured a flowing stream of milk. That miraculous manifestation convinces the former unbeliever that Christianity is right for him, and he has himself baptized at once, as he had promised. Not only that, this new hristian saw to it that all his Moorish followers and several of his Moorish acquaintances were also baptized as new Christians. This one miracle leads to a host of Moorish converts to Christianity. And as new Christians, they were to be treated as all Christians were treated, according to the laws of Alfonso's *Partidas*.

CSM 167 shows curious parallels to the pregnant Jewess narration of CSM 89, as we will see. The young son of a Moorish woman died of a serious disease and she was overcome with despair. However, she was acquainted with what Christians often would do. They would go the Marian sanctuary at Salas (in Huesca) and there the Virgin had performed miracles for them. Desperate with profound grief for her dead son, she decided to follow in their path and even prepared, in advance, an offering. Her Moorish women friends protested firmly and tried to dissuade her from invoking this Christian tradition, but off she went to Salas and prayed all night to the Virgin Mary for her son, now dead for three days.

Her prayer to the Virgin at the Salas sanctuary was direct and involved a promise: “If your law does not lie, give me my son, and I will make peace with you” (Kulp-Hill, p. 202). Her son is miraculously resuscitated and the Moorish woman made her peace – as promised – by becoming a baptized Christian at once and never failed thereafter to revere the miracle-working Virgin. Her Moorish women friends, ever obedient to another law, reviled her for forsaking that law. The narration does not tell us how they responded to the miracle of resuscitation.

Among different groups of Moors, there existed rivalries, as we learn in CSM 181. The playing field is the Moroccan city of Marrakech, held by one Moorish king, Umar-al-Mutada, but invaded by a rival king and his army of horsemen and foot soldiers. These hordes took by force all they found outside the castle walls. What was Umar-al-Mutada to do? He was counseled by his advisers to take some soldiers with him and, carrying the banner of the Virgin Mary and with additional support from a few Christians carrying crosses from their church, stage a counterattack.

This proved to be sound advice indeed, since when the invading troops saw the banner of the Virgin, they assumed a much larger army was beneath it and in short order were themselves defeated, fleeing across the river they had crossed to get to Marrakech. The refrain of CSM 181 states that “The Virgin will aid those who most love Her, *although they may be of another faith and disbelievers*” (Kulp-Hill, p. 217, emphasis added). This was what Alfonso believed and was deeply committed to.

En las *Cantigas*, Alfonso presenta un mensaje frecuentemente en conflicto con la doctrina oficial de la Iglesia: *la Virgen intercede por todos sin distinción*, para que todos [...] puedan ser perdonados “por *Aquel que puede perdonar a cristiano, judío y moro, con tal que tengan bien firmes en Dios sus voluntades.*” (H. Salvador Martínez, pp. 363-364, emphasis added)

We should keep in mind that the suggestion of showing the invading army the banner of the Virgin Mary was the advice of the Moorish counselors of the local king. And in our final narrative account of the Moors, we will learn more concerning their respect for the Mother of Jesus.

In CSM 192, we have a Christian captor, his Moorish captive and Mary's chief competitor for souls, the devil. In the province of Toledo there lived a devout Christian who held a disbelieving Moor captive. He rather liked this bearded Moor and tried fervently to persuade him to become a Christian by putting into practice Alfonso's admonition in the *Siete Partidas*: “by kind words and suitable discourses.” The Moor proved to be implacably stubborn, refusing to accept that his Mohametan faith was “deceptive, false and dubious” (Kulp-Hill, p. 229). When the Christian overlord placed his captive in a

forbidding cave, the devil quickly entered into him and they fought tooth and tongue for two long days and nights, the Moor succeeding finally in biting one finger from the devil's hand.

It was on the third day that Mary appeared to the Moor in a bright light, indicating to him an escape route and saving him from the fires of Hell. She then counseled the Moor:

Pagan, if you wish to be saved, you must depart from the devil at once and also from *the false, vain and mad, villainous dog Mohammed, who cannot help you*, and become a Christian, one of our brothers, and be of good cheer and fearless. (Kulp-Hill, p. 229, emphasis added)

The Moor, shaken by his tense struggle with the devil, complies, now seeing that he had been unwise in not accepting Christian baptism earlier. He now knows that his religious faith was mistaken since all that he had believed in had failed him in the struggle against the devil in the cave.

He is now willing to accept the Roman faith, realizing that unbelievers such as he has been must forever wander without direction, holding Christianity worthless and uselessly reaching for help to Mecca. His kind master brings him out of the cave and has him duly baptized and honors him. Like other converts, new Christian gladly thereafter served Mary who would help him gain everlasting life in Paradise.

CSM 205 is the narration in which Mary responds to Christian prayers to save a Moorish mother and her child from certain death. It has a soft-landing finale which parallels the one we have seen in CSM 107 in the case of the Jewess, Marisaltos. The refrain sets the stage: "The Virgin gladly hears a pious prayer and because of it will protect the one who is commended to her" (Kulp-Hill, p. 246). The cantiga features a Christian army engaged in besieging a strong castle held by Moors. The Christian knights, the warriors, raiders, foot soldiers and crossbowmen all assaulted the defenses of the castle and knocked down its solid walls. The Moors inside were alarmed and took final refuge in the one tall tower still standing. The tower walls were then breached by the Christian army and set on fire and many Moors perished there.

But despite the smoke and all the debris, one Moorish mother carrying her baby tightly to her chest managed to reach the very top of the tower so that her child would not suffocate. In launching their final attack, the Christian armies below saw the mother and her child huddled upon the top of the tower and immediately perceived a close resemblance to the Virgin holding baby Jesus. The Christians then prayed to both God and Mary to save them, though they be Moors, reflecting the words of the refrain.

Owing to their commending to her these Moors, the Virgin allowed the wall to fall slowly to earth and both the Moorish mother and her son were saved from harm, set down gently in a nearby meadow by the compassionate Mary. The last verses of CSM 205 tell us that “The Mooress became a Christian, and her son was baptized” (Kulp-Hill, p. 247). Knowing she was a Moor, the Christians on the scene nevertheless saw a mirror image of the Virgin with Child and commended this mother and child to Mary in fervent prayers. Their prayers were answered and the miracle of the meadow was gratefully acknowledged in two new converts to Christianity. In this cantiga, there are no Moors to dissent from her decision.

We proceed now to CSM 329, the last of our narratives of Moorish conversions, this time featuring mostly good Moors. In the area of Tudía, in Portugal, an invading Moorish army had done much damage. They made camp around the Marian sanctuary there, along with all the booty they could muster. From among the items salvaged, a small group of them selected several gold and silver coins and went and placed them on the altar in Tudía's Marian sanctuary. And why did the Moors do this? I cite Kulp-Hill's translation:

For, according to what Mohammed gave them written in the Koran, the Moors firmly believed, there is no doubt of it, that She became with child by the Holy Spirit without suffering and violence or harm to Her body, and thus conceived as a virgin. After She became pregnant, She then bore a male child and afterward remained a virgin. Furthermore, She was granted such privilege that God made Her more honored and powerful than all the angels there are in Heaven. And so, although the Moors do not respect our faith, they hold that all this about the Holy Virgin is absolutely true. Therefore, the

Moors went to pray in Her church, and each one placed some of what he had on the altar. (Kulp-Hill, p. 400)

Now comes the juxtaposition of the good Moors with one bad Moor. He was a wicked fellow and he slyly manages to stay behind the others, taking for himself all the coins placed on the altar. And as soon as he did this evil deed, he went blind and fell to the floor rigid, unable to move. Noting his absence, his chief ordered a search party, assuming that he was trapped inside the church by Christians. Upon entering, they saw their error: there lay their fellow Moor, on the ground, blind and hard as stone.

One of these rescuing good Moors noticed the missing gold and silver coins they had placed earlier on the altar and found them on the now blind Moor. When they took them from his clothing and replaced them where they had left the coins not long before, on Mary's altar, the blind and rigid Moor, no longer hard as stone, rose up, his eyes opened and he saw the light (his error). This miracle account made the rounds within the Moorish community and it was from them that the Christians learned of it.

The Moors, as we are told here in CSM 329, honor Mary's virginity after giving birth to Jesus and this fact forms part of the Quran, where Mary's is the only female name appearing in it, mentioned over thirty times and its chapter 19's title is "Surat Maryam". Given the conversion miracles concerning Moors reviewed here, alongside the displeasure coreligionists have expressed as a Moor turns to Mary and Christianity, and how explicitly one Moor rails against his own former ignorance, it helps to see these conversions as owing, at least in part, to the respect showed her in the Quran. Since Islam's holy book treats Mary and her son as holy people, even if they are not portrayed as gods to be revered or worshipped, it strikes us that these several Moorish conversions to Christianity have been movingly and objectively recounted in Alfonso's *Cantigas de Santa Maria*.

I have saved for last one noteworthy account involving a so-called pagan or heretic, narrated in CSM 335. According to Alfonso X's *Partida* VII, Title 26, which deals with heretics and desperate men, it is a question of not accepting any belief "which does not agree with the true faith which the Church of Rome orders to be acknowledged, and

observed” or, in a different vein and applied to wicked and incredulous men “who think that the soul dies with the body, and that a man will not be rewarded or punished in the next world for the good or evil he does in this”⁸.

In our final example of conversions, the protagonist is neither a Jew nor a Moor, just a non-believer, called a pagan throughout CSM 335. And it is the Virgin who puts our pagan who ‘does not agree with the true faith’ to a test which he passes with flying colors. A Sicilian, he is an idol worshipping pagan but is a good-hearted landowner who is a compassionate and charitable human being. He is also a prosperous merchant but – and I quote – “although he was a heathen who did not believe in God, he generously gave most of what he had to the poor” (Kulp-Hill, p. 407). He was tested by the Virgin in an especially hard year when the harvest had been exceptionally poor. Never thinking of himself, our pagan had generously given all that his crops had yielded to the needy and underprivileged living in his city.

In this time of great want, a poorly-dressed woman with a baby son in her arms, knocks on his door, begging the pagan idol-worshipper – for the sake of her hungry child – for some small portion of food. Even though he declares that he has given all he had away, he succeeds in scraping up some meal from the floor of his bins and begins to prepare some porridge for the infant. But when he takes the bowl of porridge to her, she has disappeared. He assumes she had gone off to beg at other doors. He commands his servants to help him search for her. But she could not be found among his heathen friends.

The pagan returns home to find that his bins are now miraculously full of wheat and barley and meal in such extravagant abundance that he could again easily feed the entire Sicilian city. When his heathen neighbors advise him to seek elsewhere for a goddess, he approaches some members of the Christian community and relates to them the miracle of his grains that had just transpired on his landholdings. He states that if they were to have a statue of a woman and child, one that the pagan community claimed not to have knowledge of, he desires to see it and have his doubts removed.

⁸ The English translations are those of Samuel Parsons Scott (see note 6), p. 1443.

The Christians inform him that in their church such a statue exists, of she who was “Mother and Daughter, Bride and Handmaiden of God” (Kulp-hill, p. 408). The heathen asks to see this statue and – gazing upon it – instantly recognizes the poor woman who had begged him for food. When the Christians tell the pagan the story of the Virgin Mary, he asks to be baptized, a baptism which was performed immediately. And this is as Alfonso predicts in Law 2 of Title 26 of the Seventh *Partida*: if heretics “by good arguments and gentle words [...] are willing to return to the faith and believe it, after they have been reconciled to the church [i.e. baptized] they should be pardoned” (Scott, p. 1443). Unbelief, expertly tested by none other than the Virgin, thus became a new and true belief for this former idol-worshipping pagan. If there was any rejection of this convert to Christianity by his fellow idol worshippers, none is mentioned, though it could be assumed.

Conclusions

In the context of the CSM, a change of religions can only mean that Christianity acquires new converts owing to the intercession of the Virgin Mary. This process affects Jews, Moors and pagans and is completely aligned with the didactic theme coursing throughout the expanded redactions of Alfonso X's Marian repertory⁹.

[...] le interesa [a Alfonso] adelantar la idea que la esencia de la tolerancia es la justicia y la razón [...]; es decir, en una sociedad en la que no todos los súbditos comparten los mismos principios religiosos, que regulan sus vidas privadas y sus relaciones públicas con el vecino, *el principio común para todos debe ser la justicia, que hace a todos iguales ante la ley, y la razón, que sobrepasa las barreras del exclusivismo en la comunidad cristiana* [...].(Salvador Martínez, p. 141, emphasis added)

None of our protagonists became a Christian by violence or compulsion, which as we have seen, was forbidden in the *Siete Partidas*. Some non-Christians in this tolerant society were familiar with Christians seeking help from Mary and are encouraged in

⁹ This goal was a constant one in the CSM as it grew from one hundred to four hundred cantigas. My ten examples alone show this: from the first 100, there are three (4, 46 and 89); from the second one hundred, four (107, 167, 181 and 192); from the third hundred, just one (205) and from the final one hundred, two (329 and 335).

moments of desperation to move in that direction when their own religion does not provide them with the answers they need and seek. In other instances, it is the Virgin who understands the problem and sends signs that inspire the non-Christian to move in a new direction, a calque on the “kind words” or “good arguments” we find in the *Partidas*, and doubtless exercised by the Christian captor in CSM 192, whose “kind words” initially fell on the closed ears of his stubborn Moorish captive.

What I have found so compelling about the conversion narratives in the CSM, seen through the lens of Alfonso's own thinking about and liberal treatment of Jews, Moors and pagans in the legal language of the *Siete Partidas*, is how harmoniously the poetic and legal codes dovetail to reflect a fair and open presentation of how the three religions might share the same space. Christian law permitted Jews and Moors to live by their own law freely in Spain, so long as they respected the things they should not do, or use, according to the prevailing Christian law of the land.

Above all else, if Alfonso's often stated goal for the realms he governed was to increase devotion to the Virgin Mary, these cantigas involving conversions –and we remember that there are others, see notes 3 and 4 – would serve as eloquent paradigms for his non-Christian subjects of the incomparable virtues of the Virgin Mary, she who desired that Alfonso be king, as he states poetically in CSM 200: “She caused me to descend from good lineage and willed that I should justly reign and be king” (Kulp-Hill, p. 240). Alfonso X did reign justly and was liberal with all other religious beliefs as long as they did not conflict with or offer challenges to Christianity. And his narratives of Jews, Moors and pagans who became willing converts to Christianity underscored his immense gratitude to the Virgin in his devotional gift to her, his *Cantigas de Santa Maria*.

We would do well to also note that, outside of the literary context of the CSM, Alfonso surrounded himself with select groups of Jews, Muslims and Christians without prejudice. They were, all of them, his subjects. But each possessed specific talents that made them special, even ideal, in helping him to carry out not only parts of his political program, but, above all, of his lofty and ever-expanding cultural projects. They were artists, musicians, translators, poets, scribes, parchment preparers, overseers and liaisons with their king. Their mostly anonymous contributions to his cultural program – in which the *Cantigas*

de Santa Maria and his *Siete Partidas* play no small role, earned Alfonso the title of Emperor of Culture, conferred on him by Robert I. Burns, S. J. in two collections of alfonsine studies (1985, 1990). It is a sobriquet which the prolific and tolerant Alfonso X still wears well.

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